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Cold War Romans

MARGARET MALAMUD

HOWARD FAST recalled in his autobiography *Being Red* that when he showed a sketch to the “censor” at *The New York Times* in 1951 for an ad he wanted to run for his self-published Marxist parable about the slave revolt against Rome led by Spartacus, the man studied it and then commented that it did not appear to have anything “demonic” in it. “What about the book?” he asked. “Anything about the overthrow of the government by force or violence?” “Not this government,” replied Fast. “Ancient Rome.” “We’ll take a chance on that.” The full-page ad ran in *The New York Times Book Review*.¹

Fast’s anecdote about censorship during the Communist witch hunt in the early years of the Cold War reveals how the forbidden could be expressed by cloaking it in Roman dress. Two interrelated texts use the slave revolt of Spartacus as a way of commenting on American politics and culture during the Cold War: Howard Fast’s historical novel, *Spartacus*, and its 1960 cinematic adaptation of the same name by Hollywood actor and producer Kirk Douglas. The Roman metaphor has productive political uses in Fast’s novel and Douglas’ film—both were intended as political interventions. Roman metaphors were deployed in mainstream 1950s Hollywood films as allegories of the global geopolitics of the Cold War and analogues of domestic politics and tensions. Fast’s *Spartacus* inverted the more common signification in popular culture of Rome as an external oppressor who stood for modern totalitarianism. Rome stands for capitalist class-divided America and the slaves stand for modern wage slaves, the exploited proletariat. Kirk Douglas’ film

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drew on Fast's novel and on mainstream cinematic tropes of Romans in an effort to offer both a Cold War allegory and a critique of domestic politics. Disagreements over the meaning of Spartacus and the slave revolt among screenwriters, the directors, and the producer and the intervention of the Hollywood studio that bankrolled the film, however, resulted in a de-radicalized, or at best, ambiguous Spartacus.

ANTIQUITY AND GEOPOLITICS

THE TROPE OF Romans as decadent oppressors enjoyed a resurgence in fiction and film during the Cold War.² These texts were structured around a polarization inherited from Victorian fiction that opposed Romans to virtuous Christians, Jews, or slaves. The distinction between Romans and their victims was now mapped onto the political and ideological map of the 1940s and 1950s.³ Rome and the Romans were deployed in a rhetoric of the Cold War, initiated by President Truman in March 1947, that universalized a discourse of freedom and set out a simple, mutually exclusive alternative: freedom or tyranny. In Hollywood historical epics, spectacles of Roman legions on the march, megalomaniacal emperors, and cruel repressive elites conveyed a tyranny associated with hyperbolic militarism. Romans in *Quo Vadis* (1951), *The Robe* (1953), and *Ben-Hur* (1959), for example, become analogues for Nazis, yet these same Romans could simultaneously become Italian fascists, Soviet Communists, or any other externalized tyrant.⁴ The symbolic elasticity of cinematic Romans who stand in for Mussolini, Hitler, and Stalin projected into antiquity an American Cold War discourse that collapsed fascism and Communism into one overriding totalitarianism that, reassuringly, would be defeated by the requirements of history.

These projections of imperial Rome also rely on colonial projections in which the audience identifies itself with the colonized or oppressed peoples of the Roman empire. What Maria Wyke has called the “linguistic paradigm” of Holly-

wood cinema—the casting of British actors as tyrannical, evil, or decadent Romans and American actors as heroic Christians, Jews, or slaves—projects into antiquity British-American colonial history, in Michael Wood's words, "the colonies against the mean mother country."⁵ The colonial model further empowers the projections of postwar film epics that make the Roman empire stand in for the tyrannies of the decadent Old World from which the United States had delivered itself in the recent war and against which it now will defend, in Truman's words, "all free peoples who are resisting attempted subjugation" in the Cold War.

The world view outlined in the Truman Doctrine was more fully articulated in the National Security Council report 68 (NSC-68) which framed the conflict between the United States and the Soviet Union as inevitable and deadly. The chief of the Policy Planning Staff of the State Department, Paul Nitze, drafted the report to President Truman on national security policy in 1950. It exaggerated the Soviet threat in order to stimulate support for embarking on a worldwide struggle against communism (and tripling the military budget). It divided the world into two powers, the United States and the Soviet Union, a division between "free society" and the "slave state." "There is a basic conflict," Nitze argued, "between the idea of freedom under a government of laws, and the idea of slavery under the grim oligarchy of the Kremlin." The slave state is portrayed as the inevitable result of Soviet ideology. It is "animated by a new fanatic faith, antithetical to our own, and seeks to impose its absolute authority over the rest of the world."⁶ The totalitarian slave state, animated by godless communism, is locked in a struggle for world dominance with democratic, capitalist, Christian America. A key message of many of the 1950s historical epics set in antiquity is that America is destined to prevail in this battle and serve as a shining model for all nations.

In contrast to postwar European nations, there was a major revival of organized religion in America during the

1950s. Over twenty-six million copies of the Bible were sold in 1952–53 alone. When Eisenhower was inaugurated in 1953, the parade of floats representing the forty-eight states was headed by a float to God. Then, in 1954, the words “under God” were added to the Pledge of Allegiance, and in 1956 the House and Senate made “In God We Trust” the national motto. Religion became an expression of Cold War Americanism. As President Eisenhower put it: “Recognition of the Supreme Being is the first, the most basic expression of Americanism. Without God, there could be no American form of government, nor an American way of life.”⁷ The new religiosity of the era did not eliminate the need for a strong defense; the threat of Communism seemed to necessitate “peace through strength.” John Foster Dulles, Eisenhower’s right-wing Secretary of State, publicly proclaimed that “there is no way to solve the great perplexing international problems except by bringing to bear on them the force of Christianity.”⁸

In the prologue to his hugely successful 1956 epic, the *Ten Commandments*, the ardent anti-communist Cecil B. De Mille made it clear that the Biblical story about to unfold in his film was directly relevant to the Cold War present.⁹ Appearing on screen, De Mille addressed spectators and said: “The theme of this picture is whether men ought to be ruled by God’s law or whether they are to be ruled by the whims of a dictator like Rameses. Are men the property of the state or are they free souls under God? This same battle continues throughout the world today.” The story, he goes on to say, is “the story of the birth of freedom.” The struggle of Moses and the Hebrew people against a cruel pharaoh who oppresses his own and foreign peoples is allegorized as a struggle of freedom against despotism, ancient and modern. “There is today as in all ages past, if you read history and the Bible,” De Mille intoned, “there is always the great group who are trying to destroy the belief in God, who say it is the opiate of the people . . . That has been the great battle since Moses and Pharaoh started fighting it, and it is the

greatest battle today since Russia and the United States are continuing the battle.”¹⁰ With Nasser’s rise to power, his overtures to the Soviet Union, and the Suez Canal crisis looming, De Mille, like Secretary of State Dulles, seemed to be warning modern Egypt that its actions, like those of Pharaonic Egypt, were contrary to the will of God and would be punished by God and America.¹¹

The linkage between the Roman past and the geopolitical present had already been made explicit during the Second World War when in 1943 Paramount re-released De Mille’s (1932) *The Sign of the Cross* with a new prologue and epilogue.¹² The prologue announced that “Nero thought he was master of the world. He cared no more for the lives of others than Hitler does.” The epilogue and the advertising poster for the film displayed a cross formed out of Allied bombers. Eight years later, the war now over, the Hollywood epic *Quo Vadis* opens with a Roman army marching and slaves, their arms and legs chained, being whipped. A male voice narrates:

Imperial Rome is the center of the empire, the undisputed master of the world. But with this power inevitably comes corruption: No man is sure of his life, the individual is at the mercy of the state, murder replaces justice . . . Rulers of the conquered nations surrender their helpless subjects to bondage. High and low alike become Roman slaves, Roman hostages. There is no escape from the whip and the sword. That any force on earth can shake the foundations of this pyramid of power and corruption, of human misery and slavery seems inconceivable.

The “inconceivable” happens on screen where an implicitly democratic Christianity will triumph over autocratic, pagan Rome. At the end of the film, the Emperor Nero is dead, and the recently converted Roman prefect Marcus Vinicius and his betrothed, the young Christian maiden Lygia, leave Rome to start a new life together. Listing the succession of empires (“Babylon, Egypt, Greece, Rome”), Marcus wonders what will be next. His friend, Fabius, says “A more per-

manent world, I hope. Or a more permanent faith.” To which Marcus adds, “One is not possible without the other.” Two thousand years later, the Cold War battle against a godless state that turns its subjects into slaves will likewise be won by Christianity—and American military strength.¹³ In the Hollywood historical epic the message is clear: God is on the side of Christian, democratic America.

REDS AND ROMANS ON THE HOME FRONT

THE MANICHEAN IDEOLOGY of the Cold War was also played out within the American body politic. As early as 1946, the chairman of the GOP National Committee offered voters a stark choice between “Communism and Republicanism.” In 1952, Richard Nixon told the *Kansas City Star* that “there’s one difference between Reds and Pinks. The Pinks want to socialize America. The Reds want to socialize the world and make Moscow the world capital. Their paths are similar; they have the same bible—the teachings of Karl Marx.”¹⁴ Good old Jeffersonian Republicans, the progressive wing of the Democratic party, and others on the political left, found themselves out of step with the majority of the country and at risk of being labeled Red or Pink. Dissenters, critics, reformers, and political activists were lumped together with real members of the American Communist Party (estimates are that Party membership in 1950 was a fraction of the population of the country, around forty-three thousand out of a population of one hundred fifty million) in a process Michael Rogin has called political demonology, the creation of monsters through “inflation, stigmatization, and dehumanization.” This exaggerated threat of the demonic justifies internal scrutiny and “allows the counter subversive, in the name of battling the subversive, to imitate his enemy.”¹⁵ For thousands of American citizens, the tactics of the Senate committee headed by Senator Joseph McCarthy, the House Committee for Un-American Activities (HUAC), the FBI, and other national and local organizations must have appeared

uncomfortably close to those employed in the Soviet Union—the country whose policies, values, and tactics were held to be the antithesis of those of the United States.

The blacklisted Communist author Howard Fast describes what it was like to live in America during the years 1946–1952: “The country was as close to a police state as it had ever been. J. Edgar Hoover, the chief of the FBI, took on the role of a petty dictator. The fear of Hoover and his file on thousands of liberals permeated the country. No one dared to vote and speak against our imprisonment.”¹⁶ Reversing the common cinematic metaphor of ancient Romans as modern totalitarian oppressors, Fast wrote that during that dark time he and other victims of the McCarthy inquisition “felt a sense of identity with the early Christians; indeed, as we saw it, we practiced a sort of primitive Christianity in emphasizing brotherhood and sacrifice, and the fact that some of us were Jewish and some not made no difference.”¹⁷ In Fast’s formulation, the tyrannical Romans stand in for the persecuting officials of the American government, and he and other members of the Communist Party were their virtuous victims. We see this reversal of the metaphor again in the 1953 religious epic, *The Robe*. The blacklisted scriptwriter cast the Roman Emperor Caligula as a demonic McCarthyesque figure who wants to purge the Roman empire of “subversives”—that is, of Christians. Marcellus, the Roman soldier who converts to Christianity, is publicly tried for treason at the end of the film.

These subversions of the common meaning of the Roman stereotype helps us see how the opposition between Romans and those they oppressed could also be used to dramatize a variety of contradictions, debates, and political oppositions *within* American culture. To take another example, on the narrative level in the Hollywood epics, the dichotomy between Romans and those they oppress obviates or at least alleviates American imperial concerns. If, in the 1950s, an American audience, relying on a polarized discourse of freedom versus tyranny, could say, “We are not the Romans,”

then it could also say, “We are not imperialists.” The rejection of a resemblance between imperial Rome and modern America was made explicit in a *New York Times* review of Michael Grant’s popular history book, *The World of Rome*. “It is a study of imperialism, topical for the Free World even though it has abandoned the methods of imperialism,” the reviewer wrote, “and certainly relevant to an understanding of the Soviet Union and Communist China where imperialism still flourishes.”¹⁸

William Fitzgerald has shown that in the toga epics, at least at the level of plot, the reality of the American empire and the runaway consumerism of the 1950s could be disowned and projected onto the Romans, and the increasing militarism, materialism, and hypermasculinity of 1950s American culture could be pitted against its “true” heart: religious sentiment, the family, and “domesticating femininity.”¹⁹ Like the nineteenth-century toga plays upon which they draw, religious epics such as *Quo Vadis* and *The Robe* are structured around a romance where a sensual and arrogant Roman military officer meets and pursues an attractive Christian maiden.²⁰ Both experience conflict: his sexual freedom and loyalty to Rome’s militaristic values compete with his attraction to a chaste and pacifistic woman. Her conflict is simpler: she has to resist her erotic attraction to the Roman official until he converts to Christianity, after which the two embrace marriage and/or martyrdom. In the intertwined narratives of romance and conversion good Christian women are mates and converters, bad women embody Roman decadence and use their wiles to manipulate the political sphere. The on-screen narrative had a contemporary relevance.

The American family was restructured and gender roles redefined in the wake of the return of American men from Europe and the Pacific after World War II. Women, who had been drawn into the workplace by the war effort, were now pushed to return home. Marriage was almost universally praised, the nuclear family rather than the extended family was hailed as the most basic institution in society, there was

a massive baby boom, and huge numbers of Americans began to live in the suburbs rather than the city.²¹ The postwar valorization of homemakers and procreators produced a cult of domesticity. Women who did not want to marry or have children were informed by *Modern Woman: The Lost Sex*, a study Betty Friedan said was “paraphrased ad nauseam in magazines and marriage courses,” that they would not enjoy sex and were more likely to be neurotic.²² Cinema’s projection of the postwar American scenario onto antiquity, where good women are depicted as Christian domesticators and bad women as imperial Roman women with public power, naturalizes and gives the legitimacy of history to the domestic re-assimilation of American women into their traditional roles of wife and mother and the domesticating of former soldiers into heads of households as husbands and fathers.

HOWARD FAST’S SPARTACUS:
WRITING AS POLITICAL ACTION

*“Our battle is not the battle Cicero led, but always the battle Spartacus led.”*²³

—Howard Fast, 1948

WHILE IN PRISON in 1950 for contempt of Congress, Howard Fast thought about Spartacus and his relevance to the class struggle. Spartacus had been a malleable symbol of resistance in the United States for labor and working men’s movements since the 1830s. Socialist C. Osborne Ward had devoted a number of pages to “the last emancipator” in his history of the ancient working classes, and American labor reformers and politicians engaged in struggles against industrial capitalism invoked his name in their speeches and writings. Karl Marx had expressed his admiration for him in an 1861 letter to Frederick Engels: “Spartacus comes across as the most excellent fellow in the whole history of antiquity, a great general . . . of noble character, a real representative of the proletariat of ancient times.”²⁴ Spartacus was easily absorbed into Marx-

ist ideology as ancient avatar of resistance against capitalist exploitation. After the Russian Revolution, Spartacus became an iconic hero in the Soviet Union. In 1916, Rosa Luxemburg and Karl Liebknecht named their Socialist organization the Spartakusbund (Spartacus League). In the last days of 1918, the Spartakusbund became the German Communist party and Luxemburg wrote its manifesto entitled the *Spartacus Manifesto*. In early January 1919, a Communist revolt broke out in Berlin which was ruthlessly suppressed by the German government. Luxemburg and Liebknecht were murdered and the organization crushed. Howard Fast, an active member of the American Communist Party since 1943, read about Luxemburg in the prison library and found her writing and example inspirational. Fast, a prolific writer of politically-charged historical novels, decided to write about Spartacus, the leader whom Luxemburg and others on the left found inspirational. Spartacus, he believed, had real relevance for twentieth century capitalist class-divided America. "All my life I have always been intensely interested in the struggles of the poor and of working people against their oppressors. And the fact that Spartacus put together an army of slaves that almost destroyed Rome intrigued me—his name seemed to me symbolic of all the revolts of that kind through history."²⁵ Fast intended his novel as a call to political action.

Howard Fast was born in 1914, the son of eastern European Jewish immigrants, and grew up in the slums of New York City. The family was always poor. His father held a number of low-paying jobs and, after his mother died, Howard began his working life at age ten. Beaten by Italian Catholic boys who called him "Christ-killer," he experienced poverty and racism at a young age. "I knew the streets and I knew what there was to know about the pain and filth and agony of the mean streets." His discovery of the New York Public Library was transformative and he read "everything." "The walls of books gave me a sense of history, of order, of meaning in this strange world," he wrote later. "I had seen my father on strike; I had seen him locked out, his head

bloodied on the picket line. I had seen the economy of my country collapse . . . I did not have to be instructed about poverty or hunger . . . all of it worked together to create in my mind a simple plea, that somewhere, somehow, there was in this world an explanation that made sense.” At sixteen he read George Bernard Shaw’s *The Intelligent Woman’s Guide to Socialism and Capitalism* “and the die was cast.” He went on to read Marx, Engels, and Veblen, met members of the Communist Party and other left-wing intellectuals and, after a trip through the South which he described as a journey “through a society in disintegration,” he came to see “that society could be planned and function in another way, called socialism.”²⁶ Like thousands of other Americans in the 1930s and 1940s, Fast joined the Communist party.

Although Fast never went to college, he published a series of commercially successful novels that made him an immensely popular working-class writer. He wanted to rescue the histories and experiences of men and women whose lives had been ignored or misrepresented in history books and the key theme of his novels was the fight against oppressive power. Fast’s first commercial success was *Citizen Tom Paine* (1943), a sympathetic portrait of the revolutionary propagandist of the eighteenth century whose writings still “can scorch a message on the minds of men for more than a century later.”²⁷ *Citizen Tom Paine* was followed by *Freedom Road* (1944), the story of an ex-slave who becomes a senator of South Carolina but is betrayed when Reconstruction fails. Fellow member of the Communist Party W. E. B. Du Bois wrote in the preface for the book: “His story is fiction, but his basic historical accuracy is indisputable; its psychological insight is profound.” Like many on the political left, Fast was outspoken in his support for the civil rights of black Americans.

In 1947, he produced *The American*, a novel about John Peter Altgeld, the Governor of Illinois who pardoned three men convicted of involvement in the 1886 Haymarket bombing in Chicago which had occurred during a workers’ protest

meeting. That same year, Fast gave a passionate speech to commemorate May Day 1947. In it, he gave workers an abbreviated history of May Day, a history that he knew had been left out of the history books. "They did not tell you in the histories you studied in school how May Day began, but there is much that was noble and brave in our past that the histories carefully blot out. It goes that May Day is a foreign importation, but to the men who made the first May Day in Chicago in 1886, there was nothing very foreign about it. They spun it out of native yarn; their anger at what the wage system does to human beings did not have to be imported." Fast goes on to describe key moments in labor history: the 1877 Great Railroad Strike, the intervention by militia and government troops, the building of armories to control protests and strikes, the formation of the Pinkerton Agency, the demonizing of communists and socialists through the creation of the "red menace," the formation of the Knights of Labor, the struggle for the eight-hour day, and the 1886 Chicago May Day marches and the Haymarket bombing in Chicago. Working-class history has been distorted or forgotten, but Fast believed that "organized labor has been the backbone of American democracy." The real enemy of democracy and those who labor is not communism at home or abroad, he insisted, it is America's own capitalist class: "the men of Wall Street, the men of the trusts, the munitions makers, the merchants of death."²⁸

In 1946, he received a subpoena to appear with others before HUAC and testify about his support of a Spanish leftist organization's attempts to raise funds to finance a hospital for Spanish Republicans who had fled to France at the end of the Spanish Civil War. Fast refused to disclose the names of contributors and was convicted in 1947 of contempt of Congress. He appealed but was sentenced to three months in jail in 1950. He was blacklisted and no press would publish his books. J. Edgar Hoover sent his agents to Signet Books which had published some of Fast's earlier books and instructed it not to sell his books and to destroy its stock. Fast

recounted that the New York *Daily Worker* reported this story, adding that Signet had just published detective writer Mickey Spillane's *One Lonely Night* in which there was a gleeful mass killing of communists by Mike Hammer.²⁹ Conservative groups pressured librarians to remove Fast's books from library shelves. In 1952, New York City school officials banned *Citizen Tom Paine* from all school libraries—even though it had once been required reading for high school students. Undaunted, Fast set up his own press, the Blue Heron Press, in order to publish *Spartacus*. It sold nearly 50,000 copies in the first three months.

Fast also wrote for the Communist *New Masses* magazine and for the communist *Daily Worker* newspaper and he gave hundreds of speeches and talks. Inspired by the example of Tom Paine and his writings, Fast wrote his own *Crisis Papers* dedicated to all Americans "who loved freedom and thought independence a cause worth fighting for and, if need be, dying for." Fast was convinced that political action was necessary to overcome "tyranny" in America which was becoming a "police state" and "a land of terror."³⁰ In 1952, he ran unsuccessfully for Congress on the American Labor Party ticket and, although in 1957 he, along with the majority of its remaining numbers, left the American Communist party after Khrushchev revealed Stalin's crimes and the Red army crushed the Hungarian revolution, he never gave up his belief in socialism.³¹

SPARTACUS AS A MARXIST HERO

"Workers, unite! You have nothing to lose but your chains!"

—*The Communist Manifesto*

"To the slaves of the world: Rise up and cast off your chains!"

—*Spartacus*³²

WHEN FAST WAS released from prison, he re-read from cover to cover a book he had been given as a gift by one of his teachers when he completed his course at the Communist Party

training school. The book was C. Osborne Ward's *The Ancient Lowly*. "There I found the story of Spartacus—and became convinced that there was a way to tell it so that it could at least approximate the truth." Years later, Fast, "with great pride" included the book's inscription in his autobiography and wrote: "This I would rather have said of me than all the critical praise my life as a Communist has denied me: 'To Howard—From the school commission, teaching staff and student body of the national training school, for exemplifying the best type of revolutionary working-class intellectual and showing exceptional solicitude for fellow students.'" ³³ Ward's efforts to rescue the history of the ancient working classes bore rich fruit in the twentieth century in Howard Fast's novel about the leader of the largest slave revolt in Roman history.

In Fast's novel, when Spartacus is in the gladiatorial school in Capua, he hears of heroic slaves whose deeds electrify him. Crixus, a Sicilian slave, now a gladiator, kept the memory of earlier slave revolts against Rome alive in Capua:

On many an evening, stretched full length on the floor of his cell, his head near the door, Spartacus heard the story from Crixus of the endless warfare of the Sicilian slaves, which had begun more than half a century before. He, Spartacus, was a slave and born out of slaves, but here among his own kind were legendary heroes as splendid as Achilles and Hector and Odysseus the wise, as splendid and even prouder, though no songs were sung of them . . . What giants they were! Eunus, who freed every slave on the island and smashed three Roman armies before they dragged him down, Athenion the Greek, Salvius the Thracian, the German Undart . . . Listening, Spartacus would feel his heart swell with pride and joy, and a great and cleansing sense of brotherhood and communion toward these dead heroes would come over him. His heart went out to these comrades of his; he knew them well; he knew what they felt and what they dreamed and what they longed for. Race, city or state had no meaning. Their bondage was universal. (119–20)

Fast considered himself a story teller—a working-class Homer, if you like—whose craft was to narrate stories that had a political charge.³⁴ His subjects were men and women

who fought against oppression—economic, political, and racial.³⁵ He knew from his own reading and life experience that their examples could energize and mobilize resistance and revolution in the present. After reading Ward, Fast went on to study Latin and immersed himself in researching Roman history: “Morning, noon, and night, I lived in ancient Rome.” The result of his efforts would be, he hoped, “an epic of the oppressed and a paean to liberty.”³⁶

In Fast’s novel, Rome is defined in economic terms.³⁷ Its economy is based on slavery, the ultimate form of economic oppression and exploitation. Slavery is the root of Rome’s vices. Political corruption, decadence, gluttony, luxury, “unnatural” sex (homosexuality), and the weakening of familial bonds all stemmed from it. Slavery, in fact, defines Rome. Cicero says about slaves that: “They are always with us, and we are the unique product of slaves and slavery. That is what makes us Romans, if you come right down to it (39).” Romans are parasites, living off the bodies and the labor of the oppressed. Roman roads, the arteries of commerce, including the traffic in slaves, are symbolically important in the novel. Rome’s empire depended upon roads and on slaves and Fast’s novel is framed by scenes of crucifixion on the Appian Way. It opens with Roman elites arriving at a Roman “plantation,” the Villa Salaria, near Capua. To get there, they have traveled along the Appian Way, lined with crucified slaves, the remnants of Spartacus’ rebels. The novel ends near Capua, by the Appian Gate, with the crucifixion of David, a Jewish slave from Galilee, the last of the rebels to be killed.

The Romans are cast as capitalists utterly devoted to commodification who “purchase power, death, and pleasure in dizzying amounts.”³⁸ From the socialist point of view, Roman expenditure, symptomatic of a warped economic structure, defines Roman corruption. The capitalist “fetishism of commodities” so repellent to Marx, is carried to a gruesome and macabre extreme in the Roman fetishizing of the gladiator-slaves. The purchased gladiator-slaves serve Romans, die in the arena for their entertainment, and their bodies

were then used by Roman exporters as a form of export sausage meat. In deliberate contrast to a rhetoric of the Cold War (and its analogues in the Hollywood epics set in Rome) which made the slave state the inevitable result of Soviet ideology, in Fast's novel it is capitalism that produced slavery in ancient Rome and wage slavery in modern America.

Fast knew that by the time of *Spartacus*, Roman society was unrecognizable from the society of the early Republic. Roman conquests, dependence on slave labor, and the riches of empire led to the loss of the old Republican virtues of industriousness, living close to the land, discipline, frugality, and temperance.³⁹ From researching and writing his novels about the American Revolution, slavery and reconstruction, and labor history, Fast believed that America, like Rome, had lost touch with its earlier Republican values. The old virtues and practices that had once defined American society—farming, manual labor, uncontaminated by the corruption of labor and industrial capitalism—had disappeared, replaced by forced wage labor. By the 1950s, the capitalist economy was churning out a dizzying array of unnecessary goods even as the labor unions and the labor movement were being disempowered by the government. Workers were distracted by consumer goods, movies, and television at the same time that they were losing control over their own lives. In Fast's Rome, the cynical politician Gracchus explained Rome's politico-economic system to the young and ambitious Cicero. It has a very modern sound to it.⁴⁰ Rome's unequal distribution of wealth, Gracchus says, is a product of a system that perpetuates inequality. There is an increasing gulf between the rich and the poor. The poor are distracted and entertained by gladiatorial games and other public spectacles. Politicians tell Romans they are free at the same time that they break up workers organizations and pay slave wages to imported workers (293). Here we can see the persistence of the Republican strain in American thought and its relationship to Rome in the work of a member of the American Communist party.

Gracchus is the only Roman in Fast's novel who possesses an ounce of goodness. He knows Rome is politically corrupt and morally bankrupt. Gracchus admits to Varinia, the wife of Spartacus, that "We never talk about how empty our lives are. That is because we spend so much time filling our lives. All the natural acts of barbarians, eating and drinking and loving and laughing—all these things we have made a great ritual and fetish of" (271). He sees that the slaves possess the virtues that Romans have lost, so he helps Spartacus' wife, Varinia, escape from Rome. Fast confessed that "through the long months of writing, I had come to love and respect Gracchus . . . Even his name was symbolic and true, for as the Gracchi were the virtue of Rome, so also was fat Gracchus, the politician, who inherited from the Gracchi's downfall." He considered Gracchus like "the rare great politician of the American scene who, for all his corruption, never severs the strings that knit him to the people."⁴¹ Eventually, Gracchus commits suicide rather than give in to Crassus who has threatened him with proscription if he does not use his popularity with the Roman people to help Crassus establish a dictatorship. In doing so, Gracchus redeems himself, in stark contrast to the acts of Fast's Cicero. "Cicero was one of those young men—present in every age—who are capable of shedding every scruple, every ethic, every confusion of current morality, every impulse to ease conscience or guilt, every impulse of mercy or justice which might stand in the way of success," Fast wrote. "This should not imply that he was not concerned with justice, morality or mercy; he was, but only in terms of self-advancement" (130). Like C. Osborne Ward who called Cicero "the most terrible enemy of the plebeians, or, as we prefer to call them, the working classes," Fast despised him.⁴²

Crassus, the wealthiest man in Rome and the general who defeated Spartacus and the rebels, owned a perfume factory and profited by employing foreign workers rather relying on slave labor. Fast's description of Crassus' visit to the factory was intended to stimulate comparisons between modern

American and ancient Roman production and conditions of labor. “Their litters were carried into the older section of Capua. There the streets became narrower, the tenements higher. . . . The tenements climbed up like a crazy jumble of children’s blocks. . . . The streets were dirty; garbage was dumped from the apartments and allowed to lie until it rotted, and the foul smell of the garbage mingled increasingly with the sweet, sickening scent of the perfume oils. . . . ‘We’ve tried to run our factories with slaves—but it doesn’t work,’ says Crassus. ‘You can force a slave to work, but you can’t force him not to spoil what he makes. . . . So now we hire Syrians and Egyptians and Jews and Greeks, and even they work only until they can save enough to buy citizenship from some ward heeler. . . . A slave eats your food and dies. But these workers turn themselves into gold. Nor am I concerned with feeding and housing them.’ ‘Yet,’ Caius speculated, ‘they could do as Spartacus did.’ ‘Workers revolt?’ Crassus smiled and shook his head. ‘No, that will never be. You see, they are not slaves. They are free men. They can come and go as they please, why should they ever revolt? There is no bond between these men and slaves’” (230–34).

The Roman patricians are the ancient analogue of the modern capitalist class, “the men of Wall Street, the men of the trusts, the munitions makers, the merchants of death.” And for Fast, Roman slaves and workers make up an ancient exploited proletariat comparable to the modern American working class. Fast was active in the labor movement when it was under systematic assault by business leaders and the government. The gains the labor movement had made in the 1930s were being dismantled. In another May Day speech, this time in 1951, Fast argued that the US government through its passing of the anti-labor Taft-Hartley Act and the McCarran law was fascist and aimed to “to enslave the working class.”⁴³ Democracy was a sham, power and wealth were in the hands of the controllers of capital and industry, and resistance was essential. Roman elites smashed the workers’ guilds, but the workers at Crassus’ perfume

factory did not revolt (231). American workers should learn from the failure of Crassus' workers and resist.

The ancient slave rebellion is, of course, a metaphor for the struggle between labor and capital. When Spartacus was in the gladiatorial school, he and a black slave were paired to fight a combat to the death for the private entertainment of Crassus and other Roman elites. Rather than fight Spartacus, the black gladiator runs toward the box where the Romans are sitting, intending to hurl his weapon at them, but is killed by guards. The Romans, Fast writes, had no inkling of what it was that made the black man crack: his mourning for "the house he had by the riverside and the children his wife bore him and the land he tilled and the fruit of the land, before the soldiers came and with them the slave dealers to harvest that crop of human life so magically transmuted into gold" (104–5).⁴⁴ In contrast to the parasitic Romans, the slaves form a community where all things are shared (except women who remain the "property" of their husbands).⁴⁵ All men are equal and form a brotherhood—Fast pointedly lists the multicultural members of the new "tribe"—Gauls, Jews, Egyptians, Greeks, Nubians, Sudanese (136). Members of the community call each other "friend" and "comrade." Women fight alongside of men and all embrace what the Romans (and modern Americans) have lost: working on the land, communal solidarity, discipline, and hard work. The community functions like a large family with Spartacus as its patriarch.

The empowered ex-slaves win tremendous victories against the Romans. Crassus later admits to the assembled guests at the Villa Salaria just how close the rebels came to overturning Rome. Five Roman armies were "wholly destroyed," Crassus says, and then informs his guests why they failed: "The whole truth is that the mass of the slaves in Italy never joined Spartacus. Do you think if they were made of such mettle we would be sitting here like this on a plantation where the slaves outnumber us a hundred to one?" (174–5). Crassus knows that the reason for their loss was not the

overwhelming power of Rome. If others had joined the rebellion, Rome would have been defeated. At the end of the novel, an old woman, weeping in front of the cross that holds the crucified David, says to Crassus, "Spartacus said to us: Rise up and be free! But we were afraid. We are so strong and yet we cower and whimper and run away" (223). In the midst of the Cold War, a time of repression, inquisition, or persecution of Communists, labor and civil rights activists, and other political dissidents, Howard Fast used ancient Rome to create a Marxist parable for modern Americans: "Workers, unite! You have nothing to lose but your chains!" The novel is a clarion call to revolution.⁴⁶

THE CINEMATIC SPARTACUS

HOLLYWOOD ACTOR and producer Kirk Douglas read Howard Fast's novel in 1957 and was captivated by it. He knew little about antiquity, but seeing the ruins of the ancient world made him think about the slaves who had built those colossal structures. "I'm always astounded by the impact, the extent of the Roman Empire. Caesarea, Israel—full of Roman ruins. In Tunisia, a coliseum. Roman ruins in England . . . Looking at these ruins, and at the Sphinx and the pyramids in Egypt . . . I wince. I see thousands and thousands of slaves carrying rocks, beaten, starved, crushed, dying. I identify with them. As it says in the Torah: 'Slaves were we unto Egypt.' I come from a race of slaves. That would have been *my* family, *me*."⁴⁷ For Douglas, the history of slavery and Judaism were intertwined.

Inspired by Spartacus' struggle against slavery, Douglas decided to produce and star in a movie about him based on Fast's novel. Universal Studios agreed to finance his company, Bryna Productions. Douglas hired Anthony Mann to direct the film but soon replaced him with Stanley Kubrick who finished the film. Douglas also hired writer Dalton Trumbo, one of the "Hollywood Ten" who refused to "name names" when called to Washington in 1947 by Sena-

tor McCarthy, to write the screenplay. Trumbo had done time in prison and was blacklisted. When released, he was forced to work on film scripts in anonymity. The blacklist was still in effect and, even though its power and influence were waning, Douglas' hiring of a blacklisted writer to write the script for a film based on a novel by another blacklisted author was still a bold act.

Kirk Douglas admitted that his characterization of Spartacus was markedly different from Howard Fast's. Fast's Spartacus has a gentle but powerful magnetism and he was respected and admired even before his arrival in Rome. His fellow slaves in the Roman mines in Libya called him Father. Douglas said his conception of Spartacus was that "Spartacus is an animal at the start, illiterate, evolving into a man reacting against circumstances, then acting on his own ideas, and becoming a leader" (310). This portrayal may—perhaps unintentionally—reflect Douglas' own life trajectory as constructed in his autobiography, *The Ragman's Son*. In it, Douglas, born Issur Danielovitch, narrates his childhood in a dirt-poor, illiterate Jewish immigrant family in white Anglo-Saxon Protestant Amsterdam, New York, and his subsequent rise, Horatio Alger-style, from a "ragman's son" to a Hollywood star and producer. In any case, the cinematic Spartacus is a far cry from the clear-cut Marxist hero of Fast's novel. It is, instead, the product of ideological wrangling over the "meaning" of Spartacus and the slave revolt as well as the intervention of Universal Studios in producing the final cut.⁴⁸

CRAFTING SPARTACUS

HOWARD FAST WORKED with Dalton Trumbo on the script. They wanted to portray Spartacus as the leader of great military campaigns against imperial Rome. To that end they wanted scenes showing the military victories of the slave armies to bring home how close the slaves had come to victory over Rome. Kirk Douglas agreed with this vision, but also

wanted heightened emphasis on the love story between Spartacus and the slave, Varinia, who becomes his wife. Stanley Kubrick wanted to inject some ambiguity into the slave rebellion and show its violence and the challenge revolutions face in remaining unified and focused. Despite the attempts of Douglas, Fast, Trumbo, and others to bring in as much of what Trumbo termed the “Large Spartacus” as possible, Universal Studios demanded numerous changes—including rewriting or eliminating a number of scenes, excising shots, and editing and re-editing the film right up to the last moment before its release.⁴⁹ Universal Studios wanted a “Small Spartacus,” a Spartacus who was the leader of a slave revolt that consisted of a large rabble of disorganized slaves who were put down by only one Roman legion, led by the Roman general Crassus.

It was pressure from the anti-communist right that prompted Universal Studios to intervene in the making of the film. In late 1959, while the production of the film was in progress, columnist Walter Winchell revealed that black-listed Dalton Trumbo was the author of the screenplay for the forthcoming film. This precipitated a right-wing attack on the film. Universal Studios head Ed Muhl, who was a friend of Kirk Douglas, explained his position clearly: “Deep ideas are nice to have in a picture. But what counts is audience appeal.”⁵⁰ Muhl worried about the negative publicity and the real possibility of a financial disaster. The prevailing Cold War consensus was that social and political revolutions fail: violent revolutionary action can not succeed. The studio system gave the studio control over the final cut of a film, and it chose to excise nearly all of the scenes that supported the “Large Spartacus.” The scenes of slave armies’ victories over the Romans and Crassus’ fear of defeat were virtually eliminated. Furthermore, as Alison Futrell has shown, Douglas’ emphasis on the love story between Varinia and Spartacus “domesticated” Spartacus by focusing on his role as a husband and father (in keeping with the gender roles and family values of the 1950s), further distracting attention from his political and revolutionary successes.⁵¹ By contrast,

Fast's Varinia had been Spartacus' partner in the slave revolt and even tortured captured Roman soldiers. But in Douglas' film, she is feminized and transformed into an exemplar of the domestic family values evident in other mainstream 1950s epics. Missing, too, in the final cut is Fast's crucial point that the rebellion failed not because of the power of Rome but because the mass of slaves in Rome did not rebel. In the film, the slaves are defeated by the overwhelming military might of Rome. There is no hint that other slaves did not join the revolt out of fear or weakness.

SPARTACUS AS RELIGIOUS EPIC

"As a Jew, it was exciting to be in the land of my ancestors, my heritage. It was exciting to realize that thousands of years ago, my people, slaves to the Pharaoh of Egypt, had been led by Moses through the Sinai and arrived here. The land of Canaan. The land of milk and honey."

—Kirk Douglas, describing his visit to Israel in
The Ragman's Son (203)

IT NEED HARDLY be said that the historical Spartacus was untouched by either Judaism or Christianity. Howard Fast's Spartacus had no religion either. But the cinematic Spartacus evokes both Moses and Christ and the epic conforms in a number of significant ways to the politics and piety of the mainstream religious epics of the 1950s. Spartacus' political acts are occluded. He becomes a patriarchal leader of a migrating tribe and a resigned sacrificial offering prefiguring the ultimate sacrifice of Christ.

Kirk Douglas made no secret of his support for Zionism. He spent time in Israel while making a movie, *The Juggler*, in 1952, and he wrote in his autobiography of his admiration for Israel and the Israeli people. Slavery and the historical experience of the Jewish people paralleled each other, he believed, and this conflation of slavery and Judaism—made explicit in each Passover seder—is evident in his film. A

number of critics have noted that Kirk Douglas' Spartacus has a Moses-like cast and aura.⁵²

The theme of exodus was a popular one in 1950s popular culture. Leon Uris' immensely popular novel, *Exodus* (1958), was made into a film and released the same year as *Spartacus*.⁵³ Dalton Trumbo left Bryna Productions early so that he could work with director Otto Preminger on the script. The novel and the film unabashedly celebrated Zionism and the establishment of the state of Israel in 1948. Preminger's film mixed conventions of the religious epic and the American western in his portrayal of the birth of the new nation. The creation of the state of Israel becomes a drama set in a new frontier, Palestine. The result, according to one critic, is "a Hollywood Western played out in the desert instead of on a prairie, a tale of brave men overcoming the dangers of a wild frontier to bring law, order, and civilization to a new land."⁵⁴ In this western set in Palestine, Arabs fill the role of the savage Indians, an inversion of the reality of the brutality and violence used against Palestinians in the establishment of the state of Israel.⁵⁵

Exodus is also a modern update of the Cecil B. De Mille biblical epic, *The Ten Commandments* (1956), one of the most popular films of the decade. In De Mille's film, Moses' struggle against Egyptian despotism was allegorized as the modern struggle against the communist Soviet Union and its allies. The film highlighted America's prominent role in that struggle. Michael Wood has pointed out that at the end of De Mille's film, Moses (Charlton Heston) is posed to resemble the Statue of Liberty. He walks up a mountainside into the light, turns, and says "Go—proclaim liberty throughout all the lands, unto all the inhabitants thereof." This is a call to and reminder of the American mission to the world. De Mille gave cinematic expression to a vision of America as the Promised Land, the home and the protector of the Judeo-Christian tradition.

In the novel and in Preminger's film, the creation of the modern state of Israel is linked to the biblical exodus. An anonymous US State Department official confessed: "*Exodus*

revealed what I suspected. The State of Israel is a remarkable revival of the ancient Hebrew nation.”⁵⁶ This linkage gave the new nation state biblical legitimacy and it also resonated with America’s own identity and mission. Since the nineteenth century, Christians from a number of sects and denominations have had a proprietary interest in the biblical history and archaeology of the “Holy Land.” This long term interest intersects and dovetails with Zionism and America foreign policy in the post-war world. In reclaiming the Promised Land as a part of the Judeo-Christian tradition, and in contemporary terms, Israel as part of the American sphere of influence, *Exodus* and *The Ten Commandments* contributed to America’s economic and foreign policy by claiming the site in the name of God and America.⁵⁷ Critics of Leon Uris’ novel noted that “it is actually an American book, which portrays Israel through American eyes.” *Exodus* made Middle Eastern history into an American epic. Kitty Fremont (Eve Marie Saint), a blond American Christian (Presbyterian) nurse, will marry Israeli hero Ari Ben Canaan (Paul Newman). The intermarriage, as Deborah Dash Moore points out, symbolizes the future of the relationship between the US and Israel.⁵⁸

In *Spartacus*, the slave rebel becomes a Moses figure, leading his “people” towards the sea which they hope to cross on their way to the Promised Land, a place he will never see. Kirk Douglas plays Spartacus as a patriarchal head of a tribe of former slaves who seek nothing as much as to return home as free men and women. According to Duncan Cooper, “Douglas’ eagerness to express his Zionist convictions led him to portray Spartacus as the leader of a mass migration of slaves back to their homes, rather than as a revolutionary who tried to change the world.”⁵⁹ Film critic Pauline Kael commented that the scenes of the slave camp with its shots of families picnicking and everyone sharing and caring for each other resembled “a giant kibbutz on the move.”⁶⁰ The film portrays the slave uprising as an exodus narrative tinged with modern Zionism rather than a political revolution against an oppressive Roman state.⁶¹

The film simultaneously allows a Christian reading of the meaning of the rebellion and the death of Spartacus through its prologue and the iconography of its final scenes. The film opens with a scene showing slaves under Roman surveillance toiling in the mines under a grueling North African sun. The voiceover prologue intones:

In the last century before the birth of the new faith called Christianity, which was destined to overthrow the pagan tyranny of Rome and bring about a new society, the Roman Republic stood at the very center of the civilized world . . . Yet even at the zenith of her pride and power, the Republic lay fatally stricken with a disease called human slavery. The age of the dictator was at hand, waiting in shadows for the event to bring it forth. In that same century, in the conquered Greek province of Thrace, an illiterate slave woman added to her master's wealth by giving birth to a son she named Spartacus. A proud, rebellious son, who was sold to living death in the mines of Libya before his thirteenth birthday. There under whip and chain and sun, he lived out his youth and young manhood, dreaming of the death of slavery two thousand years before it would finally die.

The prologue frames Spartacus' life and actions with reference to the arrival of Christianity. The audience is informed that a spiritual revolution (Christianity) not political revolution (the slave revolt) will overthrow the tyranny of Rome. The actions of the slaves are, therefore, robbed of political significance. The mainstream press had criticized Fast's novel in these terms as well: the reviewer in the *New York Times* wrote that any "schoolboy would simply refuse to believe that the 'servile' war had an outside chance of success. Or that slaves themselves were equipped to make a slave-free world."⁶² Violence is not an acceptable way to freedom and a new and better society. That better society must wait, apparently, until the formation of the United States and the emancipation of slavery under Lincoln.

Contrary to historical evidence and Howard Fast's novel, Spartacus is crucified at the end of the film. As he is slowly dying on the cross, Varinia appears with their infant son,

whom Spartacus has not yet seen. She shows him their son and promises him that she will keep his memory alive; his son will know all about his father's heroic actions. She is then hustled away from the cross and from Rome by Batiatius whom Gracchus has paid to help her escape. Maria Wyke and others have pointed out that the closing visual tableau simultaneously invokes the Christian Nativity and the Passion.⁶³ Varinia is both young mother (Madonna) and grieving mother (*mater dolorosa*). The infant son is the hope for the world and Spartacus the sacrificial martyr. Freedom and the end of slavery are deferred to another future era.

SPARTACUS AS POLITICAL REVOLUTIONARY?

"Spartacus was a big hit, even in Russia. They saw it as their revolution, the uprising of the slaves against the masters."

—Kirk Douglas, *The Ragman's Son* (334)

DOUGLAS' FILM re-inscribes Cold War ideologies about politics, religion, and the family. The fight against Roman tyranny as a metaphor for the Cold War battle against Soviet tyranny was already widely known and circulated through a series of epic films from 1951 on. Many on the right, therefore, saw Spartacus as fighting for freedom against the Kremlin and its allies.⁶⁴ The US Department of State read the film as a testimonial to the cause of freedom and Douglas traveled as a goodwill ambassador for America on behalf of the State Department and the U.S. Information agency.⁶⁵

The film does make a couple of political interventions that survived the cutting and editing process. It retains and amplifies the role of the black African gladiator whom the film names Draba. After Draba refuses to kill Spartacus in an arranged combat and hurls his weapon at Crassus, he is killed and suspended upside down from the roof of the gladiator barracks as a warning against rebellion. This scene evoked in American audiences images of the lynching of black men in the American South. Draba's death becomes a

catalyst for the instigation of the revolution and, as one scholar has noted, “the struggle of the black man becomes the visual icon of every man’s struggle to be free.”⁶⁶ The film thus gives a sympathetic response to black activism and the civil rights movement that had developed in earnest in the late 1940s and 1950s.

In perhaps the most famous scene of the film, Crassus, who has not yet seen Spartacus, announces that the lives of slaves who identify Spartacus in their midst will be spared. Rather than reveal his identity, the slaves rise up in turn to declare “I am Spartacus.” This is clearly a criticism of those who name names and the Hollywood studio system that supinely went along with the inquisition. It is a public repudiation of the blacklist and HUAC and an acknowledgment of the American heroes, including Howard Fast and Dalton Trumbo, who refused to “name names.”

Fast’s book and Douglas’ film were popular in the Soviet Union. Shortly after the 1959 Cuban Revolution overthrew the pro-US dictatorship of Fulgencio Batista, the socialist Castro government turned to the USSR for film partnerships. The result was a joint Soviet-Cuban film glorifying the Cuban Revolution: *I am Cuba* (1964).⁶⁷ In the film a group of rebels are rounded up in the tropical jungles of Cuba and brutal Batista officials demand to know which one of them is Fidel Castro. One by one the rebels answer, in turn, “I am Fidel.” Despite the ideological wrangling over the meaning of Spartacus in Hollywood and the production of a substantially de-radicalized cinematic Spartacus, Fast’s revolutionary hero of the class struggle endured. A scene in Douglas’ film that was meant as a criticism of the internal politics of the United States was appropriated in support of a Marxist Revolution that led to the first Communist state in the Western hemisphere.

NOTES

1. Howard Fast, *Being Red* (Boston 1990), 293.
2. Lloyd C. Douglas' 1942 novel *The Robe* was reprinted in 1943, 1946, and 1956, and was made into a film of the same name in 1953. Henryk Sienkiewicz's novel *Quo Vadis* was reissued in 1953 after the success of the 1951 film of the same name. The perennially popular novel *Ben Hur* was reissued in 1949 and 1959, edited versions appeared in 1954 and 1956, and it was made into a film in 1959. Thomas Costain's 1952 novel *The Silver Chalice* was made into a film in 1955. Howard Fast's 1951 novel *Spartacus* was made into a film in 1960; Pär Lagerkvist's 1951 novel, *Barabbas* was translated into English by Alan Blair in 1951, reprinted in 1955, and made into a film in 1962. *Demetrius and the Gladiators*, a sequel to *The Robe*, appeared in 1954. The films *The Big Fisherman* appeared in 1959 and *King of Kings* in 1961.
3. This paragraph and the following one are adapted from the introduction to *Imperial Projections: Ancient Rome in Modern Popular Culture*, Sandra R. Joshel, Margaret Malamud, and Donald T. McGuire, Jr., eds., (Baltimore 2001), 1–23 at 6–9. The introduction was co-written with Sandra R. Joshel and Maria Wyke.
4. For Romans as Nazis, see Winkler, "The Roman Empire in American Cinema after 1945;" in *Imperial Projections* (note 2), 50–76; for Romans as Italian Fascists and Soviet Communists, see Maria Wyke, *Projecting the Past: Ancient Rome, Cinema and History* (New York and London 1997), 142–43, 145.
5. Wyke (note 4), 23, 132; Michael Wood, *America in the Movies: or, "Santa Maria, It Had Slipped my Mind,"* (New York 1975), 184.
6. This document is quoted and analyzed in Melani McAlister, *Epic Encounters: Culture, Media, and U.S. Interests in the Middle East, 1945–2000* (Berkeley and Los Angeles 2001), 47–55, at pages 51–2. Anders Stephanson, "Liberty or Death: The Cold War as U.S. Ideology," in *Reviewing the Cold War: Approaches, Interpretations, and Theory*, edited by Odd Arne Westad (London 2000), 81–100, traces the genealogy of trope between freedom and slavery back to the seventeenth century and analyzes its meaning in the Cold War.
7. Whitfield reports that church affiliation was at its highest of any decade of the twentieth century during the 1950s, at 55% in 1950 and at 69% by 1959. Stephen J. Whitfield, *The Culture of the Cold War* (Baltimore 1991), 83–84; Alan Nadel, *Containment Culture: American Narratives, Postmodernism, and the Atomic Age* (Durham and London 1995), 92; and Peter Biskind, *Seeing Is Believing: How Hollywood Taught Us to Stop Worrying and Love the Fifties* (New York 1983), 115–16.
8. Douglas T. Miller and Marion Nowak, *The Fifties: The Way We Really Were* (Garden City, New York 1977), 91.
9. My discussion of the *Ten Commandments* draws on Nadel (note 7), 90–116, especially 92–94; Wyke (note 4), 63; and McAlister (note 6), 60–67.

10. George C. Pratt, "Forty-five Years of Picture-Making: An Interview with Cecil B. DeMille," *Film History* 3 (1989), 133–145 at pages 140–41. Interview taped in Los Angeles in 1958.

11. As Edward Said put it, DeMille "seemed to be warning Egypt that nationalism not vindicated by God and America was evil and would therefore be punished" in *The Face of Tutankhamun*, Christopher Frayling, ed. (London 1992), 281.

12. Bruce Babington and Peter William Evans, *Biblical Epics: Sacred Narrative in the Hollywood Cinema* (Manchester 1993) 184, and Wyke (note 4), 134–6.

13. In the popular science fiction film *Red Planet Mars* (1952), God directly intervenes in the Cold War by speaking on the Voice of America to Russian peasants who are so inspired by the Sermon on the Mount that they tear down portraits of Stalin in their homes. Christians in the Soviet Union replace the Kremlin oligarchy with a new government and churches are reopened.

14. Quotes taken from Whitfield (note 7), 19.

15. Estimate on Communist Party membership taken from Whitfield (note 7), 4. Michael Rogin, *Ronald Reagan, the Movie and Other Episodes in Political Demonology* (Berkeley 1988), xiii; cited in Whitfield (note 7), 15.

16. Fast, introduction to new edition of *Spartacus* (Armonk, NY and London 1996), vii–viii.

17. Fast (note 1), 242.

18. Pierson Dixon, "High Noon on the Tiber," *New York Times*, 18 September 1960.

19. William Fitzgerald, "Oppositions, Anxieties, and Ambiguities in the Toga Movie," in *Imperial Projections* (note 3), 23–49, especially 26. Peter Biskind has discussed how these changes are reflected in 1950s films, (note 7), 250–78.

20. This paragraph and the following one are adapted from the introduction to *Imperial Projections*, 14–15.

21. Elaine Tyler May, *Homeward Bound: American Families in the Cold War Era* (New York 1988); Biskind (note 7), 115–16.

22. Ferdinand Lundberg, *Modern Woman: The Lost Sex*, (New York 1947), 265. Betty Friedan, *The Feminine Mystique* (New York 1963), 119.

23. Howard Fast in NY *Daily Worker* October 26, 1948, 12.

24. *Karl Marx, Frederick Engels: Collected Works*, ed. Richard Dixon et al. (London 1975) volume 41:264–5 and Marx quoted in a review of Fast's novel in the NY *Daily Worker*, 29 February 1952.

25. "Spartacus: An Interview with Howard Fast," transcript of 28 June 2000 AncientSites chat session discussion with Mr. Fast. When asked about his "harsh" description of Rome, Fast said, "I think . . . history may take the same very dim view of us (the Americans), because, like Rome, we have fought senseless wars and we have done some terrible things to other na-

tions . . . We are currently destroying Iraq and we're responsible for the deaths of thousands of children there, for instance. And we justify all our sins, just as the Romans did. As with Rome, and Great Britain a hundred years ago, we are now more or less the rulers of the world. So it's both ancient history and contemporary history."

26. Fast (note 1), 55; Fast (note 1), 41–42; Fast (note 1), 61.

27. Alan Benoit, "Citizen Tom Paine," *New Masses*, 6 July 1943.

28. "May Day 1947," (New York 1947).

29. Fast (note 1), 296–97.

30. Fast, Crisis No. 1 available online, <http://www.trussel.com/hf/crisis1.htm>

31. In *The Naked God: The Writer and Communism* (New York 1957), Fast diagnosed the way good and idealistic people were betrayed by Stalin and the leaders of the American party. As Fast became aware of Stalin's atrocities, he read "with great excitement" Suetonius' *Lives of the Twelve Caesars*. He found that Suetonius' text, stuffed as it is with anecdotes about the paranoia, megalomania, and cruelty of Roman emperors, "bore a relationship to the life and actions of Stalin . . . and I came to the conclusion . . . that the drive for power originates at least in part from a paranoid personality." Fast (note 1), 344. Reading Suetonius on power-mad Roman emperors helped Fast understand Stalin. Gore Vidal's review of Robert Graves' translation of Suetonius makes a similar point.

32. Howard Fast, *Spartacus* (London 1974), 171. All quotations are from this edition. Future references made parenthetically in the text.

33. Fast (note 1), 276–77.

34. "I conceive of my own branch of the trade as story-telling. The stories I want to tell have a direct inter-relation—in that they all deal with the struggles of men for freedom." Howard Fast, "History in Fiction," *New Masses*, 18 January 1944, 7–9.

35. When asked why he wrote historical novels, Fast replied: "These great and splendid forgotten men did not live and die so that all they did might be traduced and falsified; they lived and fought and died so that we might inherit and use the things they built. And the same type of scoundrels as opposed them then oppose men of good will today. It all becomes one; and the great tradition we fight for today is the same tradition they sustained and handed down to us." "History in Fiction," *New Masses*.

36. Fast (note 1), 276–88; and Fast (note 31), 148.

37. My discussion draws on Alison Futrell, "Seeing Red: Spartacus as Domestic Economist," in *Imperial Projections*, 90–97; Andrew Macdonald, *Howard Fast: A Critical Companion* (Westport, CT and London 1996) 87–88; Wyke, *Projecting the Past*, 60–63; Theresa Urbainczyk, *Ancients in Action: Spartacus* (Bristol 2004), 106–17.

38. Futrell (note 37), 93.

39. Macdonald (note 37), 88–95.

40. Futrell (note 37), 93.

41. Fast (note 31), 150. But Fast reports that the “commissars” in the Communist Party disapproved: “To them . . . I have exalted a ‘capitalist beast’” and he criticized the “puritanical lunacy that caused certain people to put signs up in their homes: ‘*There will be no discussion of Spartacus here tonight.*’” Fast (note 31), 151–53; Fast (note 1), 300.

42. In Ward’s view, “The most terrible enemy of the plebeians, or, as we prefer to call them, the working classes, was Cicero, whose sense of justice was confined to his own interpretation of laws favoring the privileged class, or gens families.” Ward pointed out that Cicero was in favor of restricting the organization of workingmen in Rome even as he was prosecuting Verres, praetor of Sicily, for his rapacity which he feared might spark another servile war. C. Osborne Ward, *The Ancient Lowly: A History of the Ancient Working People from the Earliest Known Period to the Adoption of Christianity by Constantine*, 8th edition (Chicago 1888), 244.

43. “There can be no freedom for American workers if the Communist Party is outlawed and the Communist leaders jailed,” Fast went to say. “This meant fascism in Germany and in Italy, and it means fascism here.” Fast, “May Day 1951,” (New York 1951). The Taft-Hartley Act was a bill written by the National Association of Manufacturers (NAM) and passed in 1947. Its intention was to weaken the power of organized labor. The Internal Security Act or McCarran Act was passed by Congress in 1950. It established a committee to identify, monitor and in times of national emergency detain left-wing radicals and other politically objective groups. This was necessary because of a Communist conspiracy to establish a “totalitarian dictatorship in the countries throughout the world.”

44. The black gladiator is not named in Fast’s novel.

45. Futrell (note 37), 95.

46. The novel did very well. Fast sold 47,000 copies in the first three months and it became one of the most successful self-published novels of the century. When the 1960 movie was made, Fast was able to publish in commercial publishing houses and the novel remains popular today.

47. Kirk Douglas, *The Ragman’s Son: an Autobiography* (New York 1988), 304. All future references made parenthetically within the text.

48. It is tangled tale, one that has been unraveled and discussed by a number of scholars, most notably Duncan Cooper, “A Second Look: Spartacus,” *Cineaste* 6.3 (1974); “Dalton Trumbo vs. Stanley Kubrick,” 1991; “Who Killed Spartacus,” 1991; “Spartacus: Still Censored After All These Years,” 1996—these last three essays available online as “Three Essays from *Cineaste* Magazine” at the Kubrick Site, <http://www.visual-memory.co.uk/amk/doc/cooperdex.html>; Wyke (note 4), 63–72; and Futrell (note 37), 97–111. I draw on their work in the following paragraphs.

49. For what follows, I draw especially on the detailed description and analysis in Duncan Cooper’s articles gathered on the Kubrick Site (note 48).

50. Cooper (note 48), the Kubrick Site, (note 48).

51. Futrell, (note 37), 102–4.

52. Derek Elley, *The Epic Film: Myth and History* (London and Boston

1984), 110–11; Wyke (note 4), 69–70.

53. The novel appeared in 1958 and it became a bestseller and stayed on the charts for a year, including nineteen weeks as number one.

54. Lester Friedman quoted in Deborah Dash Moore, “Exodus: Real to Reel to Real” in *Entertaining America: Jews, Movies, and Broadcasting*, edited J. Hoberman and Jeffrey Shandler (New York and Princeton 2003), 207–19, at 211–12.

55. Some criticized the representation of Arabs, including *Time* magazine: “the picture goes on to sanctify the Jewish terror” (*Time*, 19 December 1969) quoted in Moore (note 54), 211.

56. Quoted in Moore (note 54), 211.

57. See Nadel’s discussion of De Mille’s film (note 7), 90–116.

58. Moore (note 54), 210–13.

59. Cooper (note 48), 30. Wyke also makes this point, (note 4), 70.

60. Pauline Kael, *5001 Nights at the Movies* (New York 1982), 547.

61. Elley (note 52), 110–11; Wyke (note 4), 68–70.

62. Melville Heath, “War of the Gladiators,” *New York Times*, 3 February, 1952, 22.

63. Wyke (note 4), 71; Babington and Evans (note 12), 194; Monica Cyrino, *Big Screen Rome* (Oxford 2005), 113.

64. Wyke (note 4), 72.

65. Cooper (note 48), the Kubrick Site (note 48).

66. Cyrino (note 63), 119.

67. *I am Cuba*, directed by Mikhail Kalatozov, USSR.

